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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, an increasing number of American children are left in self-care after school each day. Parents of these latchkey children often turn to the library as a safe place for their children to go. The purpose of this study was to determine whether public libraries have responded since 1990 to the call put forward by concerned researchers and the American Library Association for written latchkey policies, after-school programming and cooperative efforts with the community agencies to implement solutions to the problems of latchkey youth. Additionally, the type and extent of problems experienced by children's librarians with respect to latchkey/unattended children were examined. The study used survey methodology with a random sample of 118 public libraries in Ohio; 52 libraries returned the questionnaires for a response rate of 44.1%. The data were analyzed for frequencies and percentages. Results of the study show that while a majority of libraries have latchkey/unattended children present in the library, less than one-half have written policies; only limited training is provided to staff; and few programs are offered during after-school hours. Ohio libraries report having approximately the same number of latchkey children and the same number of after-school programs today as they had in 1990. Very few programs are co-sponsored by agencies outside the library. Disruptive behavior was the only problem identified as occurring frequently by a majority of responses. The cover letter and questionnaire are appended. (Contains 32 references.) (Author)

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PROGRAMS, PROBLEMS AND POLICIES: A STUDY OF LATCHKEY CHILDREN IN OHIO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Debra A. Brass

June, 1997

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades an increasing number of American children are left in self-care after school each day. Parents of these latchkey children often turn to the library as a safe place for their children to go, when day care is unavailable or too costly.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether public libraries have responded since 1990 to the call put forward by concerned researchers and the American Library Association for written latchkey policies, after-school programming and cooperative efforts with community agencies to implement solutions to the problems of latchkey youth. Additionally, the type and extent of problems experienced by children's librarians with respect to latchkey/unattended children were examined.

The study used survey methodology with a random sample of 118 public libraries in Ohio selected to receive a questionnaire. Fifty-two libraries returned questionnaires for a response rate of 44.1% The data were analyzed for frequencies and percentages.

The results of the study show that while a majority of libraries have latchkey/unattended children present in the library, less than one-half have written policies; only limited training is provided to staff; and few programs are offered during after-school hours. Ohio libraries report having approximately the same number of latchkey children and the same number of after-school programs today as they had in 1990. Very few programs are co-sponsored by agencies outside the library. Disruptive behavior was the only problem identified as occurring frequently by a majority of respondents.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to a report from the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Department of Commerce 1994), approximately 1.6 million gradeschool-age children take care of themselves for some period of time while their mothers are working. Nearly one-third of these children are five to eleven years old. The term "latchkey" child has been applied to these "unsupervised youth left in self-care" (Dowd 1992, 33).

The phenomenon of latchkey children in the United States is not a new one. During World War II, mothers joined the labor force while fathers served in the military. This left large numbers of children to fend for themselves (Dowd 1991).

Beginning in the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, the number of children identified as latchkey has been mushrooming (Willwerth 1993). The statistics are inconsistent and confusing. Studies published by the Child Welfare League of America indicate that 42 percent of children aged five to nine years are home alone occasionally or often. That figure is 77 percent for older children (Willwerth 1993). Some studies suggest that as many as ten million children are by themselves during weekday afternoons (Willwerth 1993). Yet the Census Bureau report shows approximately 3.7 percent of children aged five to eleven and 16.8 percent of those twelve to fourteen are latchkey (U.S. Department of Commerce 1994, 11). The authors of the report acknowledge that all demographic surveys suffer from undercoverage of the population. They give 7 percent as the approximate undercoverage rate for the

Current Population Survey and Survey of Income and Program Participation on which they report (U.S. Department of Commerce 1994, 1). Regardless of the actual numbers, it is clear that many American children are latchkey children.

Several factors are attributed as causes of the latchkey phenomenon. First are the large numbers of women in the workforce and the increase in the numbers of single mothers who must work (Willett 1988). Other factors include high divorce and teenage pregnancy rates, declining numbers of adults available to children in neighborhoods and an increase in the number of homeless families (American Library Association 1988). Finally, competition for limited daycare spaces and lack of affordable care options have contributed to the presence of large numbers of latchkey children in our society (U.S. Department of Commerce 1994).

It is reported that unsupervised school-age youngsters are much more likely than those who are supervised to become involved in delinquent behavior such as vandalism, drug and alcohol abuse, gang activities (Latchkey Kids Worry Parents 1994) and smoking (Gardner 1995). Additionally, they may take greater risks, have lower grades or become victims of crime (Solomon 1994).

Public libraries have not been immune to the problems brought on by the latchkey phenomenon. Throughout the United States many public libraries experience an influx of unattended children during after-school hours, on school holidays and during emergency snow days (Feldman 1990). Some of these students visit the library voluntarily to work on school assignments or to socialize with families. However, many others are there simply because there is no adult at home and the children wait at the library until a parent can pick them up after work (Willett 1988).

The impact of latchkey children on adult library patrons, legal liability and the appropriate responsibility of libraries to provide special

programming to these children are some of the important issues being debated by library professionals (Barron 1992). The need for written policies concerning unattended or latchkey children has been addressed in the literature by numerous librarians (American Library Association 1988; Dowd 1991; Fasick 1991; Feldman 1990; Lee and Buttlar 1991; Sawyer 1992).

Purpose of the Study

It is the purpose of this study to determine whether public libraries have responded to the call for written latchkey policies and after-school programming over the past seven years, and to examine the type and degree of problems reported by children's librarians when latchkey children are in the library. This study replicates some data collection in previous surveys (Lee and Buttlar 1991; Dowd 1991), but is significant because it is conducted in a new geographic region and seeks retrospective information. The study is limited to public libraries in the state of Ohio.

Definition of Terms

Children's Department -- The area in a public library which specializes in service both to children and to the adults interested in children's needs.

Latchkey Child -- An unsupervised child who is in self-care for a period of time while parent(s) is working.

Policy -- A plan or principle which guides decision making.

Programming -- The selection and scheduling of planned activities in which children may participate that are offered at the library.

Unattended Child -- A child present in a public library without the direct supervision of a parent or adult care-giver.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

While latchkey children were being discussed in education and psychology journals during the early 1980s, it was not until 1987 that the topic as it related specifically to libraries began to appear in library science literature (Dowd 1991).

According to DeCandido (1988, 12), while librarians have been dealing with latchkey children for more than a decade, "the national news media only recently discovered the library-as-day-care-center situation." Actions taken by libraries to deal with problems such as unruly children disturbing other library users and children unclaimed at closing time receive media coverage only when those actions are considered harsh or extreme. DeCandido cites newspaper stories which report on an Arizona library that prohibits unaccompanied children under age ten, and on a North Carolina library where children must have identification cards to be permitted in the library; permanent records of library misbehavior are also kept for each child at this library. The author notes that only negative or defensive attitudes taken by librarians seem to be newsworthy. News reports do not cover libraries where latchkey children are not viewed as a problem or where positive and creative solutions are employed.

The changing demographics in this country pose challenges for librarians providing children's services. Holly G. Willett (1988) identifies the increased number of mothers working outside the home and the high rate of employment of single mothers as factors contributing to problems with

supervision of children. She notes that there are two issues for librarians to address and that a single policy may not be enough to cover both situations. The first is the large number of children who come to the library voluntarily after school and second is the issue of children left at the library unattended by parents who perceive the library as a safe place. Willett suggests developing policies conducive to the needs of families, such as open hours on Sunday when many parents do not work. In addition, she advocates library programming for unsupervised children and working with other community groups to find solutions.

As Willett (1988) indicates, the safety of latchkey children in libraries is perceived differently by librarians and by the general public. The National Opinion Poll on Library Issues conducted by the Library Research Center (University of Illinois 1991) finds that 39 percent of respondents indicate libraries should provide a safe place for children to stay after school. Yet, a librarian in Los Angeles equates libraries with shopping malls--"both are public places where anybody can hang out and neither place is where you should leave your child alone for any period of time" (Cart 1992, 17).

Horning (1994) expresses her concerns for the safety of young patrons after an incident in 1993. An alleged pedophile approached an unattended child in the Children's Department. The police were called, but the man continues to be a regular patron at the library. Although the man has been banned from the Children's Department the staff must be watchful to ensure that he does not approach children who are in other areas of the library, such as the Audio-Visual Department or the corridor where a drinking fountain is located.

It is this concern for the safety of unattended children as well as the fear of legal liability which have spurred some libraries to institute

latchkey/unattended children policies. Consultation with the library's attorney is recommended prior to adopting such a policy (Sawyer 1992).

The Huntsville-Madison County (Alabama) Public Library has deliberately chosen unwritten rules for dealing with both attended and unattended children. This unwritten policy is one of engagement. The underlying philosophy is that librarians must get involved with children as they come into the library. A child is asked if he/she has read a certain book, or would like to work a puzzle or play a game. Children are not permitted to roam around. The library experiences less disruptive behavior now and if it does occur the child is confronted immediately. Parents are asked not to drop their children off at the library nor leave them unattended, and the safety of children is stressed. The library also participates in a community coalition to deal with latchkey problems (Fuqua 1988).

The opening of a new facility in 1981 brought an "explosion of utilization" to the Iowa City (Iowa) Public Library (Mueller 1987, 48). Increased demands on staff and a building design that promoted traffic flow and discouraged crowd control created many problems. In 1983 the Library Board of Trustees adopted a written policy on Unattended Children and/or Disruptive Behavior. The policy clearly defines inappropriate behaviors and specifies staff responses by age and degree of severity. Publicity about the need for such a policy was provided through newspaper accounts and a local public service cable channel. As one of the first to institute a policy of this nature, the Iowa City Public Library has received requests from more than 100 libraries for a copy of the policy.

"Latchkey Children" in the Public Library is a position paper prepared by the Services to Children Committee of the Public Library Association Division in collaboration with the Library Service to Children With Special

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Needs Committee of the Association for Library Service to Children Division (American Library Association 1988). The paper is intended to assist librarians to find solutions that do not compromise service to children when coping with the latchkey phenomenon. The paper stresses that not all latchkey children cause problems in the library. However, those who are there because of a lack of other after-school options may resent being at the library and may, in fact, cause disruptions. Librarians are cautioned not to blame children for their latchkey status, since they are actually the victims.

Latchkey children are not simply a library problem, but are a concern of the entire community. Therefore, the Committee urges libraries to work with other community agencies and to serve as a catalyst for finding solutions. Examples of programs appropriate for latchkey children and parents are presented in the paper.

Policy development is encouraged in the position paper as a way to inform the community of the library's concern for child safety; to maintain orderly, appropriate, and equitable use of the library; to reduce possible liability; to standardize and clarify staff response; and to increase staff confidence (American Library Association 1988, 15).

The paper recommends that latchkey policies need to include an introduction or statement of need, a statement of the actual policy, a clear outline of the problem, and specific procedures which staff are to take when encountering problems (American Library Association 1988, 18).

Programming has traditionally been an important part of library service to children. At the Greenfield (Indiana) Public Library, children's librarian Carol J. McMichael (1988, 42) has a goal to keep latchkey children "occupied with meaningful programs and activities which will give librarians and patrons peace of mind and the children a sense of purpose and respect." She utilizes

many creative ideas to help reach her goal. Among these are making available educational toys for younger children and board games for those who are older; providing filmstrip/cassette combinations which can be viewed and heard on equipment operated by the children; utilizing student volunteers; and establishing a Friends of the Library group. Other ideas are showing 16mm films once a week after school; providing regular children's programming several times each month; writing a monthly children's newsletter; offering after-school storytimes weekly for ages six to ten; and supplying resource aids and activity sheets to children on the use of the catalog, dictionaries and encyclopedias. McMichael notes that her ideas all need the support of staff and volunteers.

Other libraries have successfully implemented programs which positively address the needs of latchkey children. Watson (1991) reports on outreach programs implemented by the Seattle Public Library and directed toward latchkey children. Starting in 1988 under the direction of Seattle City Librarian, Liz Stroup, a Homework Enrichment Library Project (HELP) has been offered. Additionally, four small branch libraries in low income areas of the city have increased the number of children's librarians on staff. Every weekday from 4:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. at these branches the Seattle Public Library's After School Happenings (SPLASH) program has been offered. SPLASH provides regular organized activities and programs for latchkey children.

In New Jersey, a Homework Helpers program was created by the Youth Services Manager of the Montclair Public Library. In part it was developed to lift some of the burden from librarians during after-school hours, as well as to provide a valuable service to unattended children. Adamec (1990) reports that unpaid volunteers are recruited and trained to provide the

homework help. The program has been successful and there are plans for setting up individualized tutoring for young adult patrons in a special room at the library.

According to Rizzo (1991), the presence of forty to sixty latchkey children at the Wilson Branch of the Windsor (Connecticut) Public Library was the impetus for contacting the ACTION/VISTA Agency of the United States Government. The library requested and received placement of a volunteer from the Volunteer Grandparent Program. "Grandma" Eleanor Williams does not replace any staff members, but works twenty hours per week listening to children's worries, complaints and triumphs, as well as reading stories and assisting with homework.

In 1988, responding to the abundance of literature which had appeared during the 1980s about problems with latchkey children in libraries, the Queens Borough (New York) Public Library conducted a survey of its branches (Cerny 1994). Findings indicated that 25 percent of the branches had latchkey patrons who filled all available seating and were disruptive. Based on the results of the survey, the Children's Services department applied for and received funding from an LSCA Title I grant for a "Latchkey Enrichment Program" in six branches. Today, renewed LSCA funding fully supports the program in ten branches, with three other branches supported by private corporate funding or staffed by volunteers.

Homework help and supervision of activities is provided by monitors employed ten to eighteen hours per week during the school year. Craftspeople, storytellers and science demonstrators are brought in for after-school performances approximately once every other month. New reference materials, circulating curriculum support books, box games, and craft supplies are also purchased with grant monies. From its inception in 1989, the

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program has been well received and extremely successful. Over 20,000 children attended one or more sesions during 1993, up from 4,000 who participated during the first six months of the program. Importantly, discipline problems at these branches have noticeably declined.

The issue of library latchkey children is controversial and librarians disagree on the role they should take in serving these patrons. Some librarians feel that their role should not be providing day-care service to children and that service to other patrons suffers when time must be spent disciplining or entertaining unattended children (Chepesiuk 1987; Dowd 1991; Mueller 1987; Tinnish 1995).

Herbert S. White (1990b, 262) suggests that social activism within the library profession has led to an "acceptance of the moral imperative, of tackling problems because they are there." He is critical of the American Library Association's position paper on latchkey children as an example of this moral imperative. He believes the position paper recommends what library policies toward this issue should be, without even asking whether it ought to be addressing the issue at all (White 1990a).

Frances Smardo Dowd (1991) reports on her national research regarding latchkey children. In 1988 she sent a questionnaire with open-ended and short answer questions across the country to children's coordinators in public library systems servicing at least 100,000 people. Her goal was to help libraries determine their proper role in serving latchkey children and to provide recommendations for more effective service to these children.

The author's data verifies the presence of library latchkey children throughout the United States. She reports that an average of twenty-one children aged ten to twelve years are present in the library between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. at least three days per week. The majority of

respondents encounter problems of an adverse nature either sometimes or always. These problems include difficulty fulfilling service to all patrons, limited seating, destruction of library property, patron complaints and inappropriate behavior. On the positive side, Dowd reports 72 percent of the librarians see latchkey children as an opportunity to find new ways to provide effective service. Fewer than one-third of the respondents' libraries have a written policy.

From the 1988 survey findings the author recommends the following: further education for public library staff regarding appropriate services for latchkey children; development of positively worded specific policies and procedures, and communication to inform the public about these policies; reevaluation of programs, with provision of additional traditional services as a goal; public library involvement in community-wide efforts to provide latchkey services and programs in the area; and additional research (Dowd 1991, 172-73).

A second national survey on latchkey children in public libraries was conducted by Dowd (1991) in 1990. The findings show that 14 percent of the 110 respondents have latchkey children in their libraries to a great extent and 82 percent of repondents state this case somewhat. Most librarians see little change from the number of latchkey children in 1988. When asked about development of library policies and procedures regarding latchkey/unattended children, 55 percent of respondents said the situation is the same as in 1988, while 41 percent find it better.

The 1990 survey also finds that four-fifths of respondents believe their knowledge in dealing with latchkey children is satisfactory and most learn about latchkey service through reading or on-the-job experience. Information and referral services about licensed child care are provided to parents at

approximately two-thirds of the libraries. Nearly 50 percent of the libraries offer traditional library programs after school, while 25 percent provide non-traditional programs such as homework tutoring and self-help survival skills training. Dowd also finds that a significant number of respondent libraries participate in community cooperative activities aimed at serving latchkey children. These include working with agencies such as Girl Scouts; Social Services; elementary schools; daycare centers; YMCA; and departments of parks and recreation, police, and fire (Dowd 1991, 102).

The author's recommendations following her 1990 survey stress continuing to educate librarians about latchkey children; encouraging librarians to work together with community agencies; conducting additional research, especially interviewing library latchkey children; and implementing the recommendations from the children interviewed (Dowd 1991, 173-174).

As a follow-up to her earlier work, Dowd (1995) gathered information on innovative programs for latchkey youth from seventeen libraries described in her book, Latchkey Children in the Library and Community (1991). Findings reveal that programs were expanded in four libraries and modified at seven libraries. Programs were dropped at the remaining six libraries, not because of a lack of participants, but as a result of library staffing/ funding shortages or the implementation of latchkey programs at area schools. Dowd notes that technology, specifically personal computers and children's software, has a large role at the libraries still offering latchkey programming (1995, 295).

The three public library latchkey programs which were evaluated as the "best" during the writing of Dowd's book in 1990 continue to be extremely successful and have been expanded. These include Seattle Public Library's After School Happenings (SPLASH), the Free Library of Philadelphia's Learn,

Enjoy and Play at the Library (LEAP), and Rolling Meadows (Illinois) Library's Great After School Happenings (GASP). Dowd considers these programs to be "the most innovative, the most carefully planned, and the most pervasive in terms of the number of branches in the systems at which they are offered" (1995, 295). She further points out their independence from one-year grant funding. Dowd's research finds that cooperative efforts among schools, public libraries and community organizations remain a significant factor in successful programs for latchkey youth.

Linda Rome (1990) discusses her interviews about serving latchkey children with librarians at selected urban, suburban and rural libraries in the Northeast Ohio area. She notes that each community has its own issues and solutions to the latchkey situation. Some libraries are developing specific policies to handle not only unattended or latchkey children, but disruptive patrons as well. Others purposely chose informal guidelines and treat incidents on a one-by-one basis. A number of libraries provide a separate socializing area for young people, with an adult present as a moderating influence. Others hire security guards during the after-school-until-closing time period. One suburban library helped to resolve the problems and overload on staff and resources after school by seeking the assistance of community agencies.

In another study of Northeast Ohio libraries, Lee and Buttlar (1991) set out to examine the attitudes of area librarians with regard to library latchkey children and to find what library programming is available, if any, to this group of children after school. Survey questionnaires covering demographic information and type of activities offered, as well as statements for librarians to measure their attitudes were sent to a random sample of eighty-two libraries. The response rate was 54 percent.

A majority of librarians report having latchkey children in the library, but most also indicate there is not a written policy regarding these patrons. Only one-quarter of the respondents indicate programs are offered for children over age twelve years. While some libraries do provide programs such as stories, movies, crafts and booktalks, none offer ongoing programs after school on a daily basis. A majority of librarians believe unattended children are sometimes or frequently disruptive and nearly all librarians disagree that such children should be banned from the library. In fact, 82 percent feel that latchkey children provide the library with an opportunity for positive programming. The authors also report that while community involvement in solving latchkey problems is supported by children's librarians, they are not the initiators nor coordinators of community action.

In her chapter on handling problems with latchkey children, Turner (1993) points out that the information needs of latchkey children are no different from those of other children, and that the rules regarding the behavior of latchkey children are the same rules that apply to the behavior of all children using the library. She also posits that the severity of such problems as overcrowding, abuse of facilities and impossible demands on staff (which are often attendant with the presence of latchkey children) largely depends on the size of staff budgets and the amount of space in the library building (1993, 72). Since financial reality forces libraries to limit services, the real decisions lie in determining what the limits should be and how they should be enforced. Turner recommends that libraries "should choose and limit their efforts to service roles that match their resources with the unique needs of their communities" (1993, 75). In addition, it is a collective responsibility of all groups which serve children to assist in alleviating the problems caused by the presence of latchkey children in the

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community.

Turner identifies four major problems for libraries dealing with latchkey children: liability; security; disruptive behavior; and inappropriate use (1993, 77-79). She advocates written policies which clearly and positively state both what services the library will provide to school age children and what responsibilities the parents have. She suggests ways that the public might be informed of the library's policies, such as sending a letter to the home, distributing flyers, posting an unattended child rule in the library, notifying the media and working with local schools.

A 1995 review by Tinnish of library literature on latchkey children reveals a dearth of recent articles on the subject. Tinnish categorizes the available latchkey literature by type of approach and links each type to a particular level of decision-making within the public library hierarchy. First is the philosophical approach most often associated with library schools and directors of large public library systems. This approach questions whether libraries should even be offering any latchkey services. The managerial approach is a middle ground reflective of middle management and head librarians which acknowledges the existence of the latchkey phenomenon and wonders how to cooperate with community agencies to deal with the situation. The third type is a "front lines" point of view held by the circulation, reference and programming staff who work with children daily. This approach asks, "What can we do with them? for them?" (1995, 18).

Tinnish advocates that library staff "be trained for the realities of their jobs, not the ideal" (1995, 19). Further, she urges all public libraries to be prepared for latchkey children with written policies in place, with program ideas ready to be implemented should the need arise, and with efforts coordinated among community organizations.

Clearly, public libraries across the nation will continue to be challenged by the problems and opportunities latchkey children present. By cooperating with community agencies, implementing appropriate latchkey policies and creatively addressing programming options, librarians can have a positive impact on the many children in our society who must take care of themselves.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The survey method utilizing a questionnaire was employed in this study. The questionnaire (see appendix A) was developed to ascertain if more libraries today have written policies concerning latchkey or unattended children than they did in 1990; the frequency with which libraries experience problems related to latchkey children; if more after-school programming is offered in libraries today than in 1990; and the type of after-school programming being offered.

Surveys were sent to public libraries throughout Ohio which were selected at random from the 1996 Directory of Ohio Libraries. Main libraries and branch libraries each counted as one. From a total of 698 libraries, every sixth library was selected to receive a questionnaire for a sample size of 118.

A cover letter addressed to the children's librarian accompanied each questionnaire, as did a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return of the survey. The letter described the purpose of the survey and gave confidentiality assurances (see appendix B). A reply was requested within two weeks, but five weeks were required until an adequate number of questionnaires was returned. A total of fifty-two surveys were returned, for a response rate of 44.1 percent.

The completed survey responses were tallied, and frequency and percentage distributions were determined. Open-ended questions were analyzed and similar responses grouped together in rank order.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Of the fifty-two libraries that participated in the study, 49% described their library's location as rural, 35.3% as suburban and 15.7% as urban.

The vast majority of respondents (88.5%) indicated that the size of the library's collection was under 100,000 volumes. Only 11.5% reported their collection size to be between 100,000-500,000 volumes. No replies were received from libraries with a collection over 500,000 volumes.

Responses to staffing by category revealed that, on average, only .73 professional librarians, 1.96 para-professionals and .66 pages or students are employed in the children's department.

A majority of libraries (70.8%) reported they had no written policies on latchkey or unattended children in the library in 1990. However, by 1997, 44.9% indicated having such written policies. Since 87% of the respondents indicated having latchkey children in the library, there remains a gap between the presence of latchkey children and adoption of written policies to deal with them.

The most frequently mentioned way in which latchkey/unattended children policies were communicated to patrons and the community was via a brochure or flyer available at the library. Posting the policy was next, followed by informing parents or children on an as needed basis. Other procedures included a write-up in the library director's column in the local weekly newspaper, incorporating library behavior in tour talks for Head Start, kindergarten and other grades, and distributing a written notice of the policy at events for preschoolers.

The amount of training received by staff members about latchkey and unattended children in the library, regardless of whether or not a written policy existed, was reported as none by 36.5% of the respondents and limited by 57.7%. Only 5.8% of the libraries indicated that extensive training was provided to staff.

Respondents were asked to estimate the average daily number of latchkey or unattended children who are present in the library during after-school hours (see table 1). Children ages 9-12 years were most frequently reported as being without supervision in the library (82.6%), at an average of 5.3 children per day. While children over 12 years old represented the highest daily average at 5.8, a lower percentage of respondents mentioned them as latchkey or unattended (73.9%) than had indicated those in the 9-12 year old group. The higher daily average in the over 12 years group was due to two responses indicating a total of 25 and 40 children respectively. Since these two responses estimated far higher daily averages than the other responses and represented only 5.8% of the total number of latchkey children over 12 years, these numbers skew the daily average to the high side. Children in the age group 6-8 years were reported as latchkey by 56.5% of the libraries participating in the survey, at an average of 2.3 children in the library per day. As would be expected, children under 6 years represented the age group with the fewest number of latchkey/unattended children. Only 13% of respondents indicated having any unsupervised children under the age of 6, and the average daily number of such children was 0.3.

TABLE 1

DAILY DISTRIBUTION OF AFTER-SCHOOL
LATCHKEY/UNATTENDED CHILDREN BY AGE

Age (N=46)	Number of Children				
	0		≥ 1		Average
	f	%	f	%	
Under 6 years	40	87.0	6	13.0	0.3
6-8 years	20	43.5	26	56.5	2.3
9-12 years	8	17.4	38	82.6	5.3
Over 12 years	12	26.1	34	73.9	5.8

(N.B. Average equals the total number of libraries reporting **any** latchkey children multiplied by the total estimated number of children reported, divided by N)

Table 2 compares, by age group, the relative number of latchkey children visiting the library after school today with the number visiting daily in 1990. In all age groups, librarians perceive there to be approximately the same number of latchkey students today. However, in the 9-12 years group the percentage of respondents who say that the number of latchkey children in the library remains the same (48.8%) is nearly equal to the percentage who say there are more latchkey children today (46.3%). Similar findings in the over 12 years group are seen, with a nearly equal number of responses in the "same" and "more today" categories. It is important to note that some of the libraries indicated no latchkey children in certain age groups in the past and no latchkey children in those groups today; therefore, their comparison response was "same." Only 13% of the respondents indicated they had no latchkey children at all.

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TABLE 2

COMPARISON BY AGE OF DAILY LIBRARY LATCHKEY CHILDREN
TODAY VS. 1990

Age (N=41)	Number of Daily Visits					
	Fewer Today		Same		More Today	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Under 6 years	3	7.3	34	82.9	4	9.8
6-8 years	7	17.1	27	65.9	7	17.1
9-12 years	2	4.9	20	48.8	19	46.3
Over 12 years	5	12.2	19	46.3	17	41.5

The degree to which libraries experienced problems due to the presence of latchkey or unattended children is shown in table 3. The major problem addressed most often by respondents was behavior which is disruptive to staff or other patrons; 52% of the libraries indicated this problem occurred frequently. Respondents, if they acknowledged having any latchkey children, most often reported that these problems occurred seldom. Accidents/medical emergencies was the problem listed most often as never occurring. See table 3 for further details.

TABLE 3

PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED RELATED TO PRESENCE OF LATCHKEY/UNATTENDED CHILDREN

Problem (N=50)	Frequency of Occurrence							
	Never		Seldom		Frequently		Always	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Vandalism/Destruction of Library Property	6	12	36	72	8	16	-	-
Behavior Disruptive to Staff or Other Patrons	2	4	20	40	26	52	2	4
Unattended Children Present When Library Closes	9	18	36	72	5	10	-	-
Accidents/Medical Emergencies	24	48	26	52	-	-	-	-
Need for Tighter Security Measures	12	24	31	62	6	12	1	2

Table 4 shows that less than half of the responding libraries currently offer programs after school. This may be due to a shortage of staff and/or funding. Children over 12 years are the least likely age group to have programs planned for them; 85.4% of libraries do not have any programs for these children. In addition to staffing and financial shortages, a possible explanation for so few programs being offered to the over 12 years group may be that libraries have separate young adult programming which is outside the purview of the children's department. Thirty-one libraries (64.6%) do not offer any after-school programs for children under 6 years of age, yet this age group has the highest average number of programs offered after school (5.5 programs per month). This is also the age group with the fewest (13%) latchkey children present in the library. For children ages 6-8, an average

of 2.4 programs per month are offered. For ages 9-12 years the average number is 1.9 programs, and for those over 12 years the average number is 2.3 programs.

TABLE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF MONTHLY AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS BY AGE

Age (N=48)	0		≥1		Average
	f	%	f	%	
Under 6 years	31	64.6	17	35.4	5.5
6-8 years	25	52.1	23	47.9	2.4
9-12 years	27	56.3	21	43.7	1.9
Over 12 years	41	85.4	7	14.6	2.3

A comparison of the number of after-school programs currently offered versus the number offered in 1990 is presented in table 5. From the total of 37 libraries which responded to this question, most indicated that in all age categories the number of programs remained the same as in 1990. Thus, 78.4% offered the same number of programs to children under 6 years; 67.6% offered the same number to children ages 6-8 years; 73% offered the same number to children ages 9-12 years; and 81% offered the same number to children over 12 years. It must be noted that since few programs are being offered for any age group today, few programs must have been offered in 1990.

TABLE 5

COMPARISON BY AGE OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS OFFERED
TODAY VS. 1990

Age (N=37)	Number of Programs					
	Fewer Today		Same		More Today	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Under 6 years	3	8.1	29	78.4	5	13.5
6-8 years	4	10.8	25	67.6	8	21.6
9-12 years	3	8.1	27	73.0	7	18.9
Over 12 years	2	5.4	30	81.1	5	13.5

Survey participants were asked to list the types of programs in effect at their libraries according to age groups. Programs for children under 6 years tended to be of a traditional nature. The most frequently mentioned were storytimes (72.7%), followed by story/crafts (18.2%). Special offerings such as holiday or parent participation programs were also listed.

Programs presented for children ages 6-8 were storytimes (29%), crafts (25.8%), story/crafts (19.4%) and after-school specials (22.6%). Some of the creative special programs listed were kite-making, bike safety, joke-telling, computers, puppets and movies.

Crafts were the most frequently offered programs for children ages 9-12 years (33.3%), followed by after-school specials (23.3%), storytimes (16.7%), and story/crafts (10%). Specials listed for this age group were the same as those offered for children ages 6-8 years, with the addition of poetry contests, Goosebumps Club, family fun night and Junior Friends/teen council.

Programming for children over 12 years old was mentioned by only 17.3% of the respondents. Two libraries indicated they had a teen advisory council in place. The other programs mentioned were cited by one library each. These included special programs on sports cards, comic books, Star Trek, college preparation, computer training, teen poetry, and art. Also mentioned was a homework helper offered by one library.

One innovative offering deserves particular attention. The respondent library has a hands-on "museum" on site which is open during regular hours four days per week, with additional Sunday hours during the school year. Discovery Works attracts children of all ages to this library.

When asked whether any programs were offered in response to the latchkey phenomenon, the majority of libraries (82.9%) replied negatively. Of the libraries which did initiate programs, one library mentioned a Home Alone program and Red Cross Child Care Clinics. Other programs mentioned include game day, Goosebumps Club, personal computers, and activity sheets and coloring materials. Three libraries reported they had responded to the latchkey phenomenon by offering programs such as after-school storytimes and a Student Friends/library helper group; however, these are no longer being offered. One respondent noted that while the library tried to have programs, no one was interested. Another explained that more complaints than favorable comments had been received, thereby causing the library to cancel all after-school programs.

The final survey question sought information about after-school programs co-sponsored by agencies outside the library. Only 21.6% of the libraries indicated they had worked with other agencies. Most frequently mentioned were the local schools, listed by four respondents, and the YMCA, which was listed by two. The Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts and a county senior services agency

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were each mentioned once. There may have been some confusion about the definition of the term "co-sponsored" in question 14. Several respondents indicated that schools were co-sponsoring agencies with the library, then went on to say that no programs were offered at the library because the schools provided latchkey services. It was an intent of the study to find out if libraries jointly planned or offered programs with any community agencies.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The burgeoning growth of latchkey children over the past two decades has created societal problems which communities have been forced to address. As public institutions, libraries have not been immune to these problems.

The latchkey phenomenon was hotly debated in library literature from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. Calls for after-school programming, written policies and cooperative efforts with other community agencies came from concerned researchers (Dowd 1991; Lee and Buttlar 1991; Tinnish 1995; Turner 1993) and the American Library Association (1988).

This study sought to examine the problems which Ohio libraries have experienced with latchkey children since 1990, and the extent to which written policies and after-school programs have been instituted.

It appears that libraries in Ohio are moving to implement written policies regarding latchkey/unattended children. In 1990 only 30% of libraries surveyed had such policies. While that number has risen to 44.1% today, it is still far fewer than the 87% of libraries which report having latchkey children. The amount of training which children's staff receive regarding latchkey or unattended children is limited, at best. More than one-third of the respondents indicated that no training was provided to assist them in dealing with any problems related to the presence of latchkey children. Further investigation of the content of latchkey/unattended children policies and the types of training provided to staff may be warranted.

Despite the ever-increasing numbers of latchkey children in the community, Ohio libraries report having approximately the same number of such children visiting the library during after-school hours. Further, the degree to which libraries experience problems with this population is limited. Most problems associated with unsupervised children are reported by respondents to occur seldom or never. Perhaps this explains why more written policies have not been implemented. Behavior which is disruptive to staff or other patrons was the only problem identified by a majority of libraries as occurring frequently.

There has not been a push in Ohio libraries to offer more programming targeted to latchkey children after school. Fewer than one-half of the respondents offer any programming during these hours and a majority report offering the same number of programs today as were offered in 1990. Very few programs were provided specifically in response to the increased number of latchkey children in the community. Clearly, the call for increased programming has not been taken up by Ohio libraries. This is presumably the result of staff and funding shortages. The availability of other programs in the community for latchkey children is another explanation. Further investigation to determine the extent and types of cooperative programming among libraries and other agencies is suggested.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Programs, Problems and Policies: A Study of Latchkey Children in Ohio Public Libraries

Please choose the response that best fits your library and community.

1. The library is located in the following setting:

   ____ urban ____ suburban ____ rural

2. The size of the library's collection:

   ____ under 100,000 vol. ____ 100,000-500,000 vol. ____ over 500,000 vol.

3. Please indicate the number of staff members employed in the Children's Department in the following categories:

   ____ professional librarians (Master's Degree in Library Science)
   ____ para-professionals
   ____ pages or students

4. Did your library have a written policy concerning latchkey/unattended children in 1990? ____ Yes ____ No

5. Does your library currently have a written policy concerning latchkey/unattended children? ____ Yes ____ No

   If yes, please describe the ways, if any, in which your library has communicated this policy to patrons and the community:_____

   _____

   _____

6. Regardless of your response to Question 5, please indicate the degree of training staff members have received regarding latchkey/unattended children in the library.

   ____ None ____ Limited ____ Extensive

7. By age group, estimate the average daily number of latchkey/unattended children who are present in the library during after-school hours.

   ____ under 6 years ____ 6-8 years ____ 9-12 years ____ over 12 years

8. Compare the number of latchkey/unattended children in the library today with the number in 1990. Indicate your response by writing the appropriate letter in each age group:
   F (fewer today); **S** (about the same); **M** (more today)

   ____ under 6 years ____6-8 years ____ 9-12 years ____over 12 years

9. Indicate the degree to which the library has experienced the following occurrences due to the presence of latchkey/unattended children:

a. Vandalism/destruction of library property:
____ Never ____ Seldom ____ Frequently ____ Always

b. Behavior which is disruptive to staff or other patrons:
____ Never ____ Seldom ____ Frequently ____ Always

c. Unattended children present when library closes:
____ Never ____ Seldom ____ Frequently ____ Always

d. Accidents or medical emergencies:
____ Never ____ Seldom ____ Frequently ____ Always

e. Need for tighter security measures:
____ Never ____ Seldom ____ Frequently ____ Always

10. For each age group, estimate the number of programs, if any, which the library offers each month during after-school hours.

____ under 6 years ____6-8 years ____ 9-12 years ____over 12 years

11. Compare the number of after-school programs presently offered by the library each month with the number offered in 1990. Indicate your response by writing the appropriate letter in each age group:
F (fewer today); **S** (about the same); **M** (more today)

____ under 6 years ____6-8 years ____ 9-12 years ____over 12 years

12. Please list the after-school programs in effect at your library by the age group of the participating children:
under 6 years:_____

_____

6-8 years:_____

_____

9-12 years:_____

_____

over 12 years:_____

_____

13. Were any programs offered in response to the phenomenon of latchkey children in the community? If yes, which ones? _____

_____

_____

14. Are any after-school programs co-sponsored by agencies outside the library? If yes, please list the programs and sponsoring agencies:_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER

School of Library and Information Science
(330) 672-2782
Fax (330) 672-7965

Kent STATE UNIVERSITY
P. O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

Re: Programs, Problems and Policies: A Study of Latchkey Children in Ohio Public Libraries

March 15, 1997

Dear Children's Librarian:

I am a graduate student in the School of Library and Information Science at Kent State University. As part of the requirements for my master's degree I am conducting a study about latchkey/unattended children in public libraries. The enclosed questionnaire seeks current and retrospective information in order to discern if the presence of unsupervised children after school causes problems for librarians and the extent to which policies and programs have been implemented since 1990.

I realize the job of a Children's Librarian is extremely hectic, but I hope you will take five to ten minutes of your time in the next two weeks to answer the questionnaire.

Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed as you do not need to sign your name to individual questionnaires; only the investigator has access to the survey data. There is no penalty of any kind if you should choose to not participate in this study or if you would withdraw from participation at any time. While your cooperation is essential to the success of this study, it is, of course, voluntary. A copy of the results of the study will be available upon request.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at (216)646-0907 or Dr. Lois Buttlar, my research advisor, at (330)672-2782. If you have any further questions regarding research at Kent State University you may contact Dr. M. Thomas Jones at (330)672-2851.

Thank you very much for your cooperation; it is greatly appreciated. You may return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope to me at the following address:

Debra A. Brass
1415 West Miner Road
Mayfield Heights, Ohio 44124

Sincerely,

Debra A. Brass

Debra A. Brass
Graduate Student

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